TL 248

Lisbon
12 December 1991

Mr António Gonçalves
Jakarta

Dear Friend,

December here in Lisbon, is cold and rainy; the nights are long and the days gloomy in spite of the Christmas illuminations attempting to brighten up the streets. But the other evening both the Rossio - the big central square in the downtown area, do you know of it? - and Rua Augusta, as well as the Praça de Comercio fronting the Tagus, all shone bright with thousands of candles, lit for you.

Every day in Portugal, somewhere in this country, a candle is lit - for you. Everyday there is something written, with you in mind, a child does a drawing, in your honour.

Portuguese of all ages and from all walks of life, for a long time ignorant and/or thoughtless, have now re-learnt a word: Timor. And have recalled another: Solidarity.

You and your companions have made us recall words which had been forgotten for a long time in this part of the world where we tend to live on, over-preoccupied with our own small everyday concerns. It has been through you, and through your friends, that Portuguese young people have re-discovered forgotten activities: they are holding meetings, debating, writing, holding marches. It has been through you, and through your friends, that all of us, teenagers, adults, older people have gone back to these former practices. It has been through you, and through your friends, that we have recalled again some things which here in Portugal we had firmly put out of our minds: prisons for example.

But now, as regards you yourself; we know about the bars which imprison you, as well as the loneliness and the silence, which are the other side of the prison bars, harsher still than the metal.

That is why we are writing to you, to say that, however far away our voice may be, however limited our strength, we are with you. We are with all of you, to say that we will continue to light candles, to write about you, to do drawings - for you, for all of you.

And in our our celebrations during this season, Christmas and New Year, which you probably also celebrate, we will be thinking of you.

"Take courage" we will not say, because we know that this you already have. We prefer to say: "thank you for your example; thank you for the lesson you were prepared to give us".

There in the prison cell where you no doubt feel very keenly the absence of your friends and family, please accept the very, very warmest regards from all of us here. We are with you.